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A FORGOTTEN VOTIVE PLAQUE FROM DODONA:
A BRIEF ADDENDUM TO P. A. HANSEN, *CARMINA EPIGRAPHICA GRAECA*

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At the end of the 19th century Franz Trau, an Austrian tea trader, bought a bronze plaque, which was said to come from the excavations of Dodona, to add to his copious collection of Greek and Roman antiquities¹. After Trau's death the metal band got lost². The only trace of this acquisition is Gomperz's report in the *Archäologisch-epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Österreich-Ungarn*, which offered a brief description and a reduced scale drawing – two fifth of the real dimensions – of the item (fig. 1)³. The band, which bears a dedicatory inscription, was 1.68 cm high and 49.5 cm long. Almost entirely preserved, it was slightly broken in the half. The hole at its left end indicates that the band was fixed to a votive, which, likely, was of perishable material.

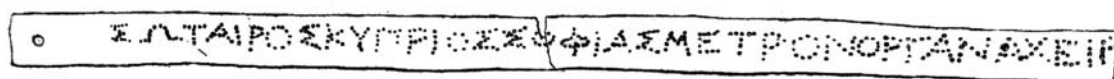


Fig. 1. From Gomperz, *art. cit.*, p. 60

The inscription consists in regular punched characters between 0.8 and 1 cm high dating to the 4th century BC on the base of the letter shape⁴. It is a hexameter running for the whole length of the band:

Σώταιρος Κύπριος σοφίας μέτρον, ὄργανα χειρ[ων]

χειρ[ων] *vel* χειρ[ός] (Gomperz)

“Sotairos from Cypros (dedicated) the measure of (his) expertise, the instruments of (his) hands.”

Despite the fact that it was a metrical inscription, it has remained almost unnoticed, since it was not included in Hansen's *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca*⁵ and only briefly mentioned in Dieterle's publication on the shrine of Dodona⁶.

The offering, on the contrary, deserves a closer analysis, which should take into account the dialectic relation between the inscription and the votive, and between these and the context of the dedication. Despite the brevity of the text and the scant material evidence available, known only by Gomperz's late 19th century drawing, questions such as ‘what did the votive mean?’ and ‘who was Sotairos from Cypros and why did he dedicate at Dodona?’ can be tackled. Significant elements come from the content itself of the dedicatory

¹ This contribution was written while holding the ‘Elena Rossi’ scholarship at the Italian School of Archaeology at Athens (SAIA). I should like to thank Dr. Santo Privitera (Athens), Dr. Edoardo Cavalli (Venice), Prof. Luisa Moscati Castelnovo (Macerata), Prof. Emanuele Greco (Athens) and Prof. Thomas Corsten (Vienna), for their comments on the first drafts of this paper.

² Most of the items from F. Trau's collection were sold by his heirs, see, for instance, some of the catalogues of the auction sale: Gilhofer & Ranschburg – A. Hess Akt.-Ges., *Sammlung Franz Trau, Münzen der Römischen Kaiser*, Wien, 22. Mai 1935, Luzern 1935; Galerie Fischer, *Antikensammlung Nachlass Franz Trau*, Wien, 16. November, 1954, Luzern 1954; Galerie Fischer, *Antikensammlung Nachlass Franz Trau, II. Teil*, Wien, *Plastiken ehemals aus Sammlung Prof. Natsch*, Wien, *Etruskische, kyprische und römische Altertümer, Gläser, Terrakottenfiguren, Vasen, Bronzen, ägyptische Totenmasken El Fayum, Marmorfiguren und Reliefs*, Auktion in Luzern, 21. Juni 1955, Luzern 1955.

³ T. Gomperz, *Dodonäische Aehrenlese*, in *AEMÖ* IV, 1880, pp. 59–61.

⁴ Gomperz, *art. cit.*, p. 59.

⁵ P. A. Hansen, *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca*, I–II, Berlin 1983/89.

⁶ M. Dieterle, *Dodona. Religionsgeschichtliche und historische Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Entwicklung des Zeus-Heiligtums*, Hildesheim and New York 2007, pp. 97–98.

inscription, which alludes both to the profession of Sotairos and to the votive and indirectly conveys to the context of the dedication.

According to the inscription Sotairos dedicated an object defined as “the measure of (his) expertise” and “the instruments of (his) hands”⁷. At first glance, it can be deduced that Sotairos dedicated his tools and he was someone doing a manual work at the service of his intelligence and creativity. This hint might point to the identification of Sotairos as a non-well-precise artist, for instance a sculptor or a vase painter. However, Sotairos’ words are only in appearance vague, since they call the attention of the (ancient and modern) audience to specific literary reminders and cross-references in the second part of the dedication. The expression σοφίας μέτρον, ὄργανα χειρ[ῶν] or χειρ[ός] as well as the use of the hexameter itself, indeed, are revealing. The combination of the words σοφίας μέτρον is not casual, but often occurs in ancient Greek literature⁸. More specifically, the duplet either indicates poetic wisdom or alludes to poetic verses. In the constitution of Orchomenos Aristotle⁹, talking of Hesiod’s death and burial, mentions an epitaph in which the poet is allotted two lives:

Χαῖρε δις ἡβήσας, καὶ δις τάφον ἀντιβολήσας,
Ἡσίοδ’, ἀνθρώποις μέτρον ἔχων σοφίης

Moreover, and perhaps more interestingly, in literary sources these two words associated occur in archaic poetry, such as Theognis¹⁰ and Solon¹¹, and with little variation, μέτ[ρα] τε καὶ σοφίαν, Stesichoros¹². On stone, it appears only once in a 450–425 BC epigram on a grave stone from Lemnos, where the couple σοφίας μέτρον was combined to recall poetic verses¹³:

[?τλημον Λ]υσίκυδες, ἀπώ[λεσας ἀγλα]δ[ὸν ἥβην] |
[γῆς π]έρι βαρνάμενος [καλλιχ]όρο πατρί[δος] |
[ἄκ]ρως μὲν σοφίας μέτρο[ν ἐπ]στάμενος |
καὶ ψυχὴν ἀγαθός· τούτω[ν μάρ]τυρές ἐσιν ἐμ[οί].

Thus the words σοφίας μέτρον, often used in poetic compositions, clarify Sotairos’ profession, who re-elaborated for his own dedication a famous duplet as he usually did while performing¹⁴. Such a ‘poetic’ mention in the epigram worked as innuendo to his profession as a ῥαψωδός for any reader of his dedicatory inscription¹⁵. Sotairos, thus, must have dedicated his musical instrument, a lyre, to Zeus Naios. The extant material evidence, consisting in the thin, but very long bronze band, almost 50 cm long, on which the inscription ran, cannot help to determine what type of lyre¹⁶ Sotairos dedicated. However, the proportions of the bronze item seem to confirm the suggestion: the object dedicated should have been quite long and

⁷ As for the close relation between the noun ὄργανον, meaning generically ‘instrument’, and the hand, see P. Chantraine, s.v. ὄργανον, in *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris 1968, p. 815.

⁸ An interesting reference to the combination of the words σοφίας and μέτρον is also in the *Tabulae Iliacae*, see M. Squire, *Texts on the Tables: The Tabulae Iliacae in their Hellenistic Literary Context*, in *JHS* CXXX, 2010, pp. 67–96, part. 72–77.

⁹ Arist. fr. 565 (Rose).

¹⁰ Theogn. *IEG* 876.

¹¹ Solon *IEG* 13, 52.

¹² Stesich. fr. S 89, 7–8 D.

¹³ Hansen, *CEG*, I, pp. 48–49 no. 82; *IG* XII, Suppl. 338.

¹⁴ M. L. West, s.v. *Rhapsodes*, in S. Hornblower – A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford 1996, pp. 1311–1312; G. Comotti, *Music in Greek and Roman Culture*, Baltimore–London 1989, p. 41; D. Collins, *Improvisation in Rhapsodic Performance*, in *Helios* XXVIII.1, 2001, pp. 11–27, esp. 11–16; D. Collins, *Homer and Rhapsodic Competition in Performance*, in *Oral Tradition* XVI.1, 2001, pp. 129–167.

¹⁵ In general, for the ‘cunning strategy of the epigram’ see M. Baumbach – A. Petrovic – I. Petrovic, *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram: an Introduction*, in M. Baumbach – A. Petrovic – I. Petrovic (eds.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 1–19.

¹⁶ As for the variety of stringed instruments in ancient Greece, see M. Mass – J. McIntosh Snyder, *Stringed Instruments of Ancient Greece*, New Haven–London 1989; M. L. West, *Ancient Greek Music*, Oxford 1992, pp. 48–70; T. J. Mathiesen, *Apollo’s Lyre, Greek Music and Music Theory in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Lincoln–London 1999, pp. 233–270.

not particularly thick¹⁷. Thus, the inscription might have been applied to a side of the lyre. Whether with the plural, ὄργανα, he meant the chords of the instrument and thus implied, *pars pro toto*, the whole object by metonymy or both, the lyre and the plectrum, it cannot be asserted.

Once established that the dedication was very likely a musical instrument, i.e. a lyre of big dimensions, and that Sotairos was a ῥαψωδός, it remains to ascertain the context of the offering. More precisely, it is important to comprehend whether the dedication in Dodona was the isolated act of piety of a devotee from Cyprus or whether the offering of the lyre entails a different and more complex frame of reference.

In the light of recent analysis and study of the dedications at Dodona¹⁸, the meaningful offering of Sotairos is not to be understood as an extravaganza from a devotee coming from a distant place to visit the shrine of Zeus Naïos. On the contrary, the votive frames itself in a specific cultural context, that of the musical competitions of rhapsodes in the ancient Greek world.

As largely demonstrated¹⁹, Dodona, as well as many other sanctuaries, was the ‘theatre’ of pan-Hellenic games²⁰. The discovery of two miniature tripods, bearing the inscriptions Τερψικλῆς : τῶι Διὶ Ναίῳι : ῥαψωιδὸς ἀνέθηκε²¹ and Κλέαρχος Διομέδοντος ῥαψωιδὸς μ’ ἀνέθηκε²², respectively of the 5th and 4th/3rd century BC, along with other finds, such as a 6th century BC cymbal²³ and the statuette of a flute player²⁴, and a lead oracular tablet mentioning Φιλέτας τραγωδός²⁵ are hardly to be interpreted as casual votives of rhapsodes and τραγωδοί dedicating at Dodona after having won festivals elsewhere. More likely they are evidence for rhapsodic (and dramatic) competitions performed at Dodona, which attracted people on a large scale even from beyond the regional borders.

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¹⁷ Beside the tentative suggestion of A. Bélis, Á propos de la construction de la lyre, in *BCH* CIX, 1985, pp. 201–220, esp. 213, who gives measures of lyres, not always matching with the pictures she includes, it emerges from the sources the extreme variety of forms and dimensions of stringed instruments.

¹⁸ Dieterle, *op. cit.*; J. Piccinini, *The Customers of the Oracle of Dodona through the Analysis of the Archaeological and Literary Evidence up to the Mid-4th Century BC*, Diss. Oxford 2012.

¹⁹ M. L. West, Rhapsodes at Festivals, in *ZPE* CLXXIII, 2010, pp. 1–13.

²⁰ As for the Naia in Dodona, see P. Cabanes, Le concours des Naia de Dodone, in *Nikephoros* I, 1988, pp. 49–84; F. Quantin, Recherches sur l’histoire et l’archéologie du sanctuaire de Dodone. Les *oikoi*, Zeus Naïos et les Naia, in *Kernos* XXI, 2008, pp. 2–31, part. 12–14.

²¹ Ath., NM 450; C. Carapanos, *Dodone et ses Ruines*, Paris 1878, pl. XXIII, 2-2bis; D. Evangelidis - S. Dakaris, To Ieron tis Dodonis, A’ Iera Oikia, in *AEphem* 1959, p. 148, fig. 3; *SGDI* III, 5786; H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus*, Oxford 1967, p. 277 no. 10; M. L. Lazzarini, *Le formule votive nella Grecia arcaica*, Roma 1976, p. 198 no. 142; C. Tsouvara-Souli, The Cult of Zeus in Ancient Epirus, in P. Cabanes – J.-L. Lamboley (eds.), *L’Illirie meridionale et l’Épire dans l’Antiquité*, IV, Paris 2004, p. 518; Dieterle, *op. cit.*, p. 375 F408; West, *art. cit.*

²² Paris, Cabinet des médailles. L. Robert, *Collection Froehner*, I, *Inscriptions grecques*, Paris 1936, p. 44 no. 39, pl. XVI.

²³ Ath., NM 812.

²⁴ Ath., NM 25.

²⁵ É. Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires de Dodone*, Genève 2006, no. 104.